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Office of
Personnel Management

Washington, D.C. 20415

Executive Registry

79-1678

In Reply Refer To.

JUL 12 1979

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Your Reference:

Personnel

MEMORANDUM TO HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Alan K. Campbell
Director



SUBJECT: President's Meeting With Federal Employees

On May 21, 1979, the President held a discussion with thirteen Federal career employees in the Cabinet Room of the White House. He outlined his views on many issues of serious concern to all Federal employees, such as pay, retirement, benefits, reorganization, and implementation of the Civil Service Reform Act.

As many of you have reported to me, employee morale has been adversely affected by inaccurate information on Administration positions. Now that the President has set the record straight, I feel it would be useful for all Federal employees to know the President's position on the issues. In conjunction with the White House, OPM has prepared an attractive low-cost pamphlet and a videotape (also available in 16mm film) featuring the highlights of the meeting. Many agencies already have ordered pamphlets and films for distribution to their employees.

Pamphlets, videotapes, or films may be ordered by contacting our Office of Public Affairs, at 632-4588. I have enclosed a copy of the pamphlet for your information.

Enclosure

MAY 21, 1979



The President of the United States

Meets With Federal Employees

United States of America
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Office of Public Affairs

Dear Federal Employee:

Monday, May 21, 1979, President Jimmy Carter met with thirteen Federal employees in the Cabinet Room of the White House.

The purpose of the meeting was two-fold: (1) to allow Federal employees to ask the President questions about his position on issues of concern to the Federal work force, and (2) to give the President information about what Federal employees are thinking.

The President is, in his words, the "top employee" of the Federal Government. His opinions and views on the issues are important to all of us who work for the Government. This President, more than any other President, has been interested in making Government more efficient and productive. He has always recognized that the average Federal worker is competent and dedicated to doing a good job, but that we formerly lacked the tools to be more effective. We would not have those tools now without the President's personal commitment to civil service reform. Last year's enactment of the Civil Service Reform Act was a landmark event for the Federal work force.

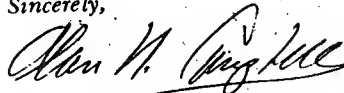
Jimmy Carter is interested in more than just the machinery of Government, he is interested in the people who make it work.

This pamphlet provides every Federal employee with the substance of what was discussed at that historic May 21 meeting. Although the original transcript has been edited for clarity and brevity, all of the questions and the President's responses are reprinted here.

The President comments on the proposed merger of the Civil Service Retirement System with the Social Security System; states his position on raising the minimum retirement age, and his views on the new ethics and financial disclosure provisions, merit pay, contracting out, whistle-blowers, waste and fraud, the Senior Executive Service, and employee morale. He also discusses his rationale for the 5.5% pay cap, the new compensation reform legislation, the elimination of free parking, the protection of employee jobs and rights in reorganizations, and personnel ceilings.

I strongly recommend that you read this pamphlet and pass it on to your colleagues. I think you will find it enlightening and reassuring.

Sincerely,



Alan K. Campbell
Director

The Meeting



Opening Remarks

The President. First of all, I would like to welcome you to the Cabinet Room. Today is a special occasion for me to have a chance to meet with a representative group of career civil servants in our Government. You have been chosen because of outstanding achievement and you have received awards for special contributions to make our own Federal Government more effective and more efficient and a greater credit to me and to the country.

In the last two-and-a-half years I have been privileged to be part of the system which represents the American people in our Government and I have recognized with a growing degree of appreciation the high quality and dedication of the overwhelming majority of people in the civil service.

I know that you represent the armed forces, you represent the farmers, you represent the children in the schools, you represent people who are handicapped, you represent those who are looking for good housing, you represent the taxpayers, and you represent others who have perhaps only one contact with the Federal Government as a principal source of advice and counsel.

We are in a time of concern and troubled feelings on the part of the American people about energy, inflation, peace in the world, taxation, and ethics. And you are partners in trying to address these troubled times, to meet the challenges and also take advantage of the exciting opportunities that we have to make a great Nation's Government even greater.

[REDACTED]

The American people are concerned about Government. When I campaigned around the country for two years, most of the expressions of concern about waste, red tape, over-regulation, often came up in town hall meeting-type formats from Government employees themselves. Those who work for the Government out in the field actually see in a much more vivid way than the average citizen in private life that any such defect in the Government ought to be rooted out. And I have tried, since I have been in this office, to form a partnership with you. When there is waste, we want it to be eliminated.

Almost all of you have contributed substantially and have been rewarded for your contributions to elimination of waste. We have tried to reduce the red tape, get rid of unnecessary regulations. And on the rare occasions when there is fraud in Government, I have tried to form a partnership with you to root out that fraud.

We have now gotten the Congress to pass legislation authorizing Inspectors General in the different agencies. They are not only a constant source of investigation and improvement and inspiration, but they are also individuals to whom you can go if you have a complaint or if you have a beneficial suggestion or if you have a report to make about a defect in Government, and you will be protected from any sort of punishment.

Whistleblowers

I think we need to have some protection for whistleblowers who come forward in a courageous way and say, "This is wrong in our Government. This is something that has been a defect for a long time and I want it rooted out." In the past, there have been cases where those kinds of people have been punished. The example of that punishment has restrained others from coming forward in an effective way to improve the Government's structure.

I was very pleased when the Congress passed the civil service reform legislation. That legislation was evolved by people like you, working with Alan (Scotty) Campbell, and that legislation was put forward to the Congress and passed in a very fine form.

Senior Executive Service

We are now seeking to let the volunteers who want to come forward to take advantage of the Senior Executive Service, and the overwhelming portion of senior executives do, indeed, want to participate in the kind of career opportunity that lets their initiative, ability, drive, and competence be recognized. And, it is an inspiration to those who serve in Government to do an even better job.

I think that Scotty has been very pleased at the vast percentage of those who have left the security which they formerly had, when everybody moves in a lockstep, no matter who does a good job and who doesn't, to the kind of competitive world where excellence will indeed be rewarded.

The suggestions that were made last year by more than 42,000 Federal employees and saved our Nation over \$318 million are a very good example of a new spirit of enthusiasm and dedication on your part and on the part of other thousands of people like you. Some of them are very tiny savings, a few hundred dollars or maybe a few thousand dollars at most. But I remember one by a NASA employee that saved our Government \$30 million. He recommended that when a space shuttle was launched, it might be launched not with a carefully designed new type of engine, but launched from the top of a modified 747.

This kind of savings is a very good step in the right direction. I know that you have some concerns that you want to express to me this afternoon. This program is being taped to let other Federal employees know about our interrelationships with one another.

I think it is good for me immediately to put your mind at rest about two or three rumors that have been floating throughout the civil service.

Minimum Retirement Age

There are absolutely no plans to raise the minimum age at which Federal employees can be retired and draw their retirement benefits. I don't know where the rumor came from. I had never heard about it before it was publicized in the paper. Several of the civil servants have come to Scotty Campbell and my staff and said, "Why are you planning to raise the minimum retirement age?" We have no plans to raise the minimum retirement age.

Retirement System Merger

Another question has been raised about the prospect of combining the Social Security and Civil Service Retirement Systems. I have taken no position at all on this. The Congress mandated that a Commission study the feasibility or advisability of this step. This Commission is now doing the assessment work. It will make a recommendation, I think, just before Christmas, on December the 20th. And when that recommendation is made, all of you will have access to it. The Congress will have access to it. Scotty Campbell will have access to it. So will I.

[REDACTED]

Following that, decisions can be made accordingly. But in no case will the vested rights of civil servants who have contributed to a retirement fund be lost. I can't imagine any circumstances under which those vested retirement funds would be lost to you. This is a problem, I know, for many people who are concerned about security, to have the study going on. But I want to emphasize again that no decisions have been made. I have not taken a position on it. I do not intend to until I can very carefully study the report that will be concluded in December.

5.5% Pay Cap

I might make two other points very quickly. We have established, and the Congress, as you know, has approved the 5.5 percent pay cap. This was done under the intense pressure of nationwide inflation. With fringe benefits, which are included in the guidelines for private employees, it amounts to more than a 6 percent increase for Federal employees. This is not as much as many employees would like. But our Nation is faced with a very serious prospect of increasing inflation.

I firmly believe, in spite of the fact some might not like the idea, that we in Government ought to take the initiative in trying to constrain inflation. And a one percent difference between what the Federal employees get and the maximum limit under the voluntary wage guidelines, I don't think is too great a sacrifice to make to provide an example and also let the people who support us with their tax monies have confidence that we ourselves are willing to take action to control inflation in a time of trouble and challenge for our Nation.

Compensation Reform

The other point I would like to make is that we have now under preparation a proposal to reform the compensation system. Scotty Campbell will go over this in detail with you and the heads of the unions and those who are interested. We must take action of this type in order to protect the comparability system. Otherwise, we are going to be back in a position which the Government witnessed many years ago when every year the Congress would decide whether or not to give a certain salary increase. And to bring the Federal employees' pay scale into an accurate comparable situation with other employees is a very important challenge to us all.

I am determined to bring this about so that there will be stability, credibility, and predictability in the establishment of pay levels for Federal employees in the future.

Let me close by saying that I am grateful that you would come. I recognize among you superior achievement. Because you are here and because your own fellow workers know you are here, I know they will look to you for advice and counsel and a report when you return to your own jobs.

We have an outstanding Nation. The people look to us for leadership. In the past, and even now, they have sometimes been disappointed. I get my share of the criticisms when the people are disturbed. You will have to share those criticisms with me. But that should just inspire us to work in a closer spirit of harmony and partnership and do an even better job to correct the defects and the problems that we all know do exist at times in the Federal Government and set an example for the rest of the Nation and restore the credibility and the trust that is an integral part of strengthening our democratic system.

Question: Mr. President, we appreciate very much this opportunity to be with you and appreciate your encouraging statements about Federal employees. I hope this meeting can serve to better communicate your positions and your concerns to the Federal employees throughout the country. I think the Federal employees, over two million of them, look to you as their leader and developer of the policies and the programs that affect their very welfare. We do get feedback and there are concerns and perhaps perceptions by a number of employees that a number of steps taken by the Administration have indicated an "anti" attitude towards employees, such as the comparability pay concept, the rumors about retirement changes, payment for parking for Federal employees, the overall ceiling on executive salaries, the restructuring of the pay system, and so forth.

I think all of those issues collectively have created a great deal of misconception on the part of our employees. I wish you could perhaps comment generally on this, and do you see new positive programs on the horizon that will be favorable to the Federal employee?

The President: I think many of the things we have already done have been indeed favorable. I don't think anybody would deny that the new civil service legislation is favorable. It does provide more competition and it does provide, at the same time, a higher incentive for superb performance. But those are the kinds of characteristics that ought to pervade the feeling and attitude of every employee, including the President of the United States. It commensurately provides a higher degree of reward for those who are highly qualified and who are highly motivated and who do superior work. In my opinion, that is a major step in the right direction.

As I said before, I don't believe that the little more than 6 percent increase in pay plus fringe benefits is too great a sacrifice to ask among the civil servants who work with me in Government.

When I checked among my own Cabinet officers and within the White House staff, the top staff members, they were completely willing not to have any increase in their salaries during the time of very high inflation when we need to address this issue in a forceful fashion and also set an example for the rest of the country.

As I said, the 7 percent limit is the maximum limit. There have been many settlements around the country at a much lower level than this. I can't do anything other than disavow the inaccurate reports that have been made about minimum age for retirement and so forth.

Parking Fees

I forgot to mention a few minutes ago about the elimination of the right for free parking. As you know, this is a privilege that will be enjoyed until October when it will begin to be phased out. It has been enjoyed by just a very small portion of the Federal employees.

In a time of energy shortages, in a time of need for the conservation of energy, in a time of very high air pollution, I believe it is a proper decision to have Federal employees on the same basis as private employees, paying a very modest amount of parking fees which will be an instigation to the sharing of an automobile by several employees where most of them now come in, as you know, one person in an automobile. Also, it will tend to make the use of a new rapid transit system more effective and more attractive. But I don't have any apology to make for ending free parking. It is something that is not highly popular. But I don't think it is an unwarranted sacrifice to ask.

Question: Do you foresee in the years ahead that Federal employees will be treated as well as employees in the private sector in terms of cost of living?

The President: Yes, I believe if we can pass the compensation reform legislation. The idea there is to have the Federal employees, in a very predictable way, have pay schedules that are accurately comparable to those paid in the non-Federal sector. It also permits some flexibility from one community in our Nation to another, so that the salaries are indeed comparable. That is the goal we want to achieve.

Contracting Out

Question: My concern is contracting out for services. We hear everything is going on contract.

My employees are the lowest paid in the wage rate system. They have no bumping rights. There is only one place to go, home. What is going to happen to those people?

The President: I am very concerned about the protection of the rights of employees of that kind, as you undoubtedly have known. When I was beginning our programs to reorganize the Government, to make it more efficient, more effective, I went into every major agency in the Washington area, personally, to answer questions. Sometimes five or six thousand people would come and I would answer questions in the courtyards of the Pentagon and other places. That was a frequent one asked: "Will you

protect the jobs of people who might be affected when the Government is reorganized?" We have had six reorganization plans already approved. I think that I can say that within the best of our ability, I think successfully, we have protected the careers of those who might adversely have been affected.

The contracting part of decisions is made when the head of an agency is convinced, along with Office of Management and Budget guidance, that contracting itself can save the taxpayers and the Federal Government substantial amounts of money. I have been extremely cautious in not putting forward my own approval of contracting outside full-time employees unless it is obvious that employees themselves will be protected and also that the Government will benefit by reduced cost for a given level of service.

If you have any information that would indicate that we have made a mistake in that respect, I wish you would give it to me. I will be glad to have it. I will discuss this with the Office of Management and Budget and also with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and make sure that this does not occur again.

Director Campbell: If I might add, Mr. President, under the new guidelines OMB has put out, which will go into effect May 30, for any activity currently being done by the Government, there is a bias in favor of calculating the costs by giving a 10 percent advantage to continuing it in the Federal Government.

In addition to that, there are employee protections in situations where there is contracting out. I don't mean to suggest for a moment there aren't problems. There are indeed problems and they are very human problems. But I can assure you that both the agency and the Office of Personnel Management do everything possible to protect the rights of employees and to go a step beyond that and do everything possible to find them employment elsewhere in the system.

Question: May I add something? I am in the Pentagon. I do quite a lot of work with contracting. Every one of these contracts is treated very specifically on a case-by-case basis. All of the very things that Director Campbell is talking about are considered: personal rights, environmental impact, impact on a low-cost area or an area that is in trouble economically. There are occasions when we go on contract to find out maybe it wasn't the very best case. But I would say that was rather an exception. I would say the program is being very well monitored from where I sit.

The President: My impression has been, maybe from a biased point of view, that we are much more cautious now with the new regulations, Scotty, than was the case three or four years ago about protecting employees' rights.

Ethics Act

Question: You mentioned the word ethics. I think that the new conflict of interest law was needed. There wasn't any doubt about it. But now I think maybe the pendulum has swung a bit far and maybe we are beginning to lose some really top-level people because of overly restrictive conflict of interest regulations.

I am concerned that in the future we may deny ourselves some very good people because these folks will be afraid the very things they will do in Government will preclude their following through with a career outside of Government.

The President: This has been of concern to us. We have discussed it several times around the table when the full Cabinet was here. As you know, there was one amendment added to the ethics legislation in the Senate that we did not support that created a technical problem. We are now working with the House and Senate to get those defects corrected, hopefully, before the first of July. We have had a few people who have resigned from Government service because they felt that the new ethics legislation restricted them excessively in their future dealings with the Government as it related to jobs that they were doing in the Government now. I think that it was necessary for some people to leave the Government because in the past there has been too much abuse by people who served in the Government for a limited period of time who got special knowledge or influence within the Government structure itself, went out and formed either a consulting firm or joined a legal firm, and came back and used improperly their former contacts in the Government. That kind of thing ought to be rooted out.

Employee Morale

Question: The morale factor, I think, is a very significant one that we have to react to.

I don't know of one situation where we have gotten favorable publicity, to the degree that I think we should, other than what we got on the shot to the moon. People got up and said, "My God, look what they did."

It is unfortunate that we are not communicating the real good that this Government does for our people.

The President: What you say also concerns me. I am the representative of the employees of the Government and I am the top employee in the Government. I would say, not quite facetiously, that anybody who thinks they are being criticized as an employee ought to pick up the newspaper every day and compare the criticism they get to the criticism I get, every day. I don't object to it because I know that constructive criticism can make us do a better job and correct errors in Government or defects in the Government.

The thing that I have tried to do is to acknowledge freely that there has been excessive regulation, excessive red tape, excessive waste, excessive bureaucratic confusion, and on rare occasions excessive fraud, and to point out that the rooting out of those things is not me against 2 million Federal employees but it is me along with the overwhelming proportion of those Federal employees, all of us trying to improve the Government mechanism together. In other words, it is not me and the public against the Federal employees, it is me and the Federal employees as partners trying to make the Federal Government better.

For example, the year before last, last year, again this year, we are setting all-time records in the export of agricultural products to foreign countries. This is something that everybody knows I didn't do. This has been done by the superb professional economists, advisers, and foreign sales experts within the Department of Agriculture.

So I think there is a great deal of natural appreciation for what Federal employees do. The thing I want to do is make us all not be satisfied and not wince or cry out loud when we are criticized, but say we are trying to correct those defects and we are trying to make it so that we are not subject to legitimate criticism in the future.

But I am very pleased at how we have been courageous enough to tackle problems that have long existed in Government. And I believe that we have begun to convince the American people now that we are trying to root out those few instances of fraud and that we don't try to cover up or hide those instances because we ourselves might be embarrassed.

It is somewhat of a reflection on me as President, having been in office for two and a half years, to find that there is a person in the General Services Administration who is violating the law. But I would rather root that person out and let the public know we are rooting him out than to leave that person there. If I get part of the blame, I am just willing to accept that. I am sure that most civil servants would agree.

Personnel Ceilings

Question: Sustained personnel ceilings get to a point where they become detrimental. I am sure the Government wants to do what is most efficient. But sustained personnel ceilings are a real burden. I think this area needs to be examined very thoroughly.

The President: I agree to some extent. Let me give it to you from my perspective.

I have tried to restrain the growth in total Federal employment, but I have tried to do it in such a way as to eliminate excessive employees when normal attrition takes place in areas where they are not needed. Let me give you two quick

[REDACTED]

Within the last two weeks, we have had two Ambassadors retire: one in Switzerland and one in Egypt. The one in Switzerland is a non-career officer who is a top businessman, very successful. The other one is a career officer, Herman Eilts, who has served in the Mideast for 30 years.

Both of them, when I asked them on retirement, "What is your major suggestion for improvement in the ambassadorial service?" said, "We have entirely too many people in the foreign embassies of our country, in Egypt and Switzerland. We could do a much better job if we had fewer people."

I have contacted the Secretary of State and the Office of Management and Budget and we are going to send a small team around to visit a representative number of embassies in foreign capitals. If we can see where we can do a better job with fewer people, that will be great. Then if we save 200 employees or 2,000 employees, if we can increase the number of agricultural experts who sell American grain overseas—that would be a good change, right?

That is the kind of thing we are trying to do. But we have not cut down overall levels of employment. We have tried to maintain them constant. But we try to focus the need and fill those needs, and we have tried to eliminate excessive employees where they are not needed.

I can't deny sometimes we make a mistake. Sometimes the impositions are arbitrary. But I have really tried to look at it personally. Obviously I have to take the recommendations of your agencies and also the Office of Management and Budget. But I get involved in it personally and try to make the best judgment I can.

Health Benefits

Question: I feel that many Federal employees are concerned about health benefits. Will the new health insurance plan contain a clause to cover dentistry? the high cost of dentistry is not covered in most health insurance plans we have in Government. Has any provision been made for that?

Director Campbell: We are working with the carriers now about the possibility of including dental coverage in health plans. One of the difficulties is that dental coverage is very expensive and health coverage in general is becoming much more expensive.

We hope hospital cost containment will help in that regard, but in order to include dental coverage, there would have to be a very substantial increase in the cost of health insurance to both the employees and to the Government.

[REDACTED]

We are now looking very hard to see if there can be some cutbacks in some of the medical coverage to include dental. Then the employee can make a choice of the package he or she may want. We are very aware of it. We hope very much we will be able to accomplish it. But within what we think is a reasonable cost, it is going to be very difficult.

Merit Pay

Question: I would like to get back to Civil Service Reform, which I agree is an effective step forward. One major concern I have run into is the merit pay implementation. As a personnel director, I am responsible for seeing that it is implemented effectively, but I don't think the employees feel that it can be done fairly and equitably. I would like to know your view. And to follow up on that, do you plan to recommend extending merit pay to grade levels other than 13 through 15 supervisory and managerial levels?

The President: The concept of the Civil Service Reform Law was understood by me fairly well when we had the debates and when I met with Congressional committees and when I went out and met with all of the employees in different agencies. And I think that the idea was to try it at those particular pay levels first and make sure we did have a smoothly functioning program before we extended it to other pay levels.

I think Scotty Campbell might very well comment on what he sees as the problems in implementation. Maybe you could meet with Scotty later to see if you have any particular cases where you don't think it has worked effectively. You could discuss them with him. Scotty, would you respond to that?

Director Campbell: First, may I say, to reinforce what you said, Mr. President, about the Senior Executive Service, we are delighted that, so far, over 3,000 have already agreed to join; only seven have said no. This is in contrast to the predictions we got during the period of passage and I think speaks very well for the Federal employees at the top. They are willing to take risks. They are willing to be measured against their performance. On the whole, I would argue that that is a demonstration to the public and to all of us that we have a group of top managers in this Government who are willing to put their jobs on the line.

In relation to merit pay, there is no question that since we have not had performance appraisal in the Federal Government that amounted to anything, there is a great deal of concern among those at grades 13 through 15. My own judgment is we are making good progress. Many of the agencies are now giving training in how you do performance appraisal. My guess is that like the Senior Executive Service, after people get through the first fear of change, that there will be a general acceptance of it. But it is difficult.

It is going to take time. The private sector people tell you how difficult it is. But none of the major companies are thinking of abandoning it because if you don't have performance appraisal, what do you base decisions on? That means you make automatic decisions and you lose what we hope will be brought out of it.

I can assure you, Mr. President, we are working very hard to provide training on performance appraisal. We are working with the employees in doing so. I think a year and a half from now we will have the same kind of response in performance appraisal that we are now getting to the Senior Executive Service.

The President: Scotty, how closely do you work with personnel directors to make sure the initial stages of it are working?

Director Campbell: We work very closely with the personnel directors across the Government as well as with the Assistant Secretaries. I must say, we learn as much from them as they learn from us as we attempt to put these systems into place.

The President: Scotty, my time is running out, but let me say this—as we get into the program on merit pay more thoroughly in the weeks and months ahead, I hope that if a problem does evolve where you and the personnel directors agree that we have an unforeseen problem, that you will come to me and let me know about it. We will see what we can do to alleviate the problem.

Director Campbell: I certainly will.

The President: I think that the principle, as you know, is very similar to the Senior Executive Service, that within a certain reservoir of funds, the ones who do superior work get a higher level of pay. And that, I think, will be an incentive for all of us to try to do a better job, to let the American people be truly proud of the outstanding work that we hope to continue to do in Federal Government service.

I am part of you. I am very pleased today to have you, representatives of different agencies and also the different pay levels and also the different careers, come and meet with me. I have learned a lot in preparing for this meeting. I have also learned a lot from your comments and questions. I wish you well in the future and I know you wish me the same. We will do a good job for the taxpayers of our country.

Thank you very much.

The Participants

Ray E. Burris, GS-12
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Dr. George R. Carruthers, GS-15
Naval Research Laboratory

Yolanda H. Carrillo, GS-5
Internal Revenue Service

Joseph P. Cribbins, GS-15
Department of the Army

Audrey N. Gibson, GS-13
Department of Housing and Urban Development

Joyce G. Hill, GS-9
Department of Commerce

Angelina Garcia, GS-17
International Communications Agency

Rudolph F. McDuffie, GS-10
Department of the Army

Dr. Francis J. Mulhern, GS-18
Department of Agriculture

L. David Taylor, GS-17
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Joan L. Van Der Lyke, GS-8
Department of State

Sharon H. Wilkin, GS-12
Department of Labor

William E. Williams, EL-V
Internal Revenue Service

Films and videotapes of the meeting are available for purchase from:

*The National Audiovisual Center
8700 Edgeworth Drive
Capitol Heights, Maryland 20028*